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dissertation on
Diarrhoea or Looseness

C. Purnell

admitted March 13. 1811



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peculiar to me

Wm. D. Walker

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Diarrhoea or Looseness.

Cullen makes this disease to consist in an evacuation by stool more frequent and of more liquid matter than usual. This leading and characteristic symptom is so diversified in its degree, in its causes, and in the variety of matter evacuated that it is almost impossible to give any general history of the disease.

So closely is this complaint allied to dysentery in many of its symptoms that we may readily confound the two diseases. But nosologists have endeavoured to distinguish them by alleging that diarrhoea is never contagious, is unattended by fever, has evacuations though not perfectly natural, yet much more so than in dysentery, - and is accompanied by less torment and tenesmus. - All this is true as a general rule: But take the most aggravated form of diarrhoea and the mildest attack of dysentery and we shall find them so much alike in all the leading characteristics as hardly to be distinguished by the most accurate observation.

Diarrhoea is defined a morbid increase of

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peristaltic motion. But it may be produced by so many causes, and is so various according to the difference of these causes, that it is almost impossible to speak definitely of the subject.

It is sufficient for our purpose to divide the disease into Idiopathic and Symptomatic.

The first may be induced by causes acting directly on the stomach; or by impressions made on the alimentary canal through the medium of the general system. Of the former causes of diarrhoea the most common are, certain ingesta which produce their effect either by their quality or quantity; and among the latter causes are checked perspiration, ulcerous passions, excessive fatigue, and certain diseases, as dentition, retrocedent gout, rheumatism, fever, &c.

In diarrhoea each discharge is preceded by a murmuring noise, and flatulence in the intestines, together with a sense of weight and uneasiness in the lower part of the belly, which cease on the discharge taking place; but are again renewed before the one, which is to succeed, ensues. As the disease advances the stomach becomes affected, and sickness, nausea and vomiting occasionally prevail: the countenance turns pale, and

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the skin is dry and rigo. If the disease continue for any length of time, universal emaciation, dropsy of the lower extremities, and relaxation of every part ensues, together with a great loss of strength.

In forming our prognosis in this disease we are to determine by the particular cause from which it arises; whether symptomatic of another disorder and whether of a critical nature; as likewise by the degree of debility present in the system and the length of time it has continued.

Dissections of persons who have died of idiopathic Diarrhoea have shown ulceration of some portion of the intestines is the morbid state most unusually met with; in which case the inner membrane is often abraded to a considerable extent, and its muscular coat made bare. Dissections have likewise shown that the most frequent seat of such ulceration are the follicular glands, and that these now and then become cancerous and assume the same appearance as scirrhus and cancer in other parts.

When Diarrhoea has been symptomatic the morbid changes of these organs belong to the primary disease of which the Diarrhoea is merely a symptom.

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Treatment. In the treatment of Diarrhoea two leading indications always present themselves: The first is to remove the morbid cause; the second is to check intestinal action by allaying irritation and imparting tone to the bowels.

Persuaded that the purging is sometimes induced by something irritating or offensive applied to the alimentary canal, I believe that an emetic is often indicated under such circumstance: After its operation is over a dose of rhubarb may be given with advantage: But should any fever exist, as often happens, it would be proper to resort to venesection; and this to be succeeded by some diaphoretic medicine of which opium should always constitute the basis. Exactly the same plan of treatment is adapted to the complaint arising from other causes; except when it can be traced to checked perspiration: In this last case evacuations from the alimentary canal are not always sufficient, we should endeavour to restore the surface to its natural condition; and for this purpose the warm bath or some diaphoretic, as the Spiritus minderere, effervescent draughts, will be eminently beneficial. This and other recent cases.

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fever-hora are simple in their nature and not difficult of cure.

A different treatment is required in chronic & protracted & long standing and more difficult connected with a diseased condition of one or of the chief principal viscera. Here our inquiries must be directed to the state of the system. & to determine what cure the disease may have procured if there is a cure and ~~cardiothorax~~ is most commonly the case we should not hesitate to resort to the lancet. The propriety of venesection in this case is attested by the ample experience of its good effects and is completely established by the appearances of inflammation discovered by dissection: nor will a single bleeding however always always answer in the case before us. chronic complaints tho' not so dangerous as have a truer hold upon the parts which they occupy than the more violent and to dislodge & dislodge them & banish them more difficult. we should not be disappointed therefore if no striking effects follow the first bleeding in chronic cases of disease. But we should go on repeating it every day or two as long as the condition of the

pulse and strength of the patient will admit of the practice, and in these cases it is fair to be satisfied with the result. For if this practice confined to a few: on the contrary it is pursued by the best practitioners of this city. We should recollect however that copious venesction is also dangerous; the blood should be drawn often and in small quantity at a time.

As a part of the same plan of treatment emetics of Specac: two or three times a week. These do not act principally as emetics, though as such they are of advantage; but by producing a set of new actions they break down the morbid associations, and invigorate the condition of the whole alimentary canal.

After such impressions as we desire have been made by the continuous use of venesction and emetics of Specac: then a combination of rhubarb, Specac, Sipuncus may be given with advantage; and at night on going to bed ten grains of Dovers powder should be taken in it. operation promoted by warm beverages.

Much advantage may be derived from the habitual use of the warm bath; but to this

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its full effect something stimulating should be added to the water as mace, saffron, or cayenne pepper: a bath of brine is highly recommended when use it should be employed every day, and generally just before going to bed. After the patient has entered his bed he should be rubbed all over with a fresh brush till a glow is diffused over the whole body.

The remedies already mentioned having proved insufficient we are next to have recourse to some preparation of alum. This medicine is exceedingly valuable in diarrhoea and is particularly well suited to the state of the disease now under consideration. It is decidedly true to the bruisers and may be administered so as to prove moderately laxative. Three or four grains combined with half a grain of opium may be given three or four times a day. In some cases a small portion of senna may be added with utility, especially if the surface of the body is dry & the vessels are harassed with griping or other unquietness. A combination of alum and white vitriol is much esteemed by a Notley in the treatment of diarrhoea (and denominates by him the vitriolic solution). It is made thus.

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Take of White vitriol 3ij
rock alum 3j
Cochineal 3vij
victoria water 6j.

Mix these together in a marble mortar until the solution is cold, and when the sediment is deposited pour it off clear from it. The alum may be increased or diminished according to circumstances, that is, when much evacuation is required it is necessary to lessen the quantity of alum and increase that of the white vitriol twice or so. The dose is from a teaspoonful to 3ss every six hours. Sometimes it may be necessary to give the alum & white vitriol in equal quantities. In moderate cases the remedy should be retained for weeks or even months. In violent & a fable species, it generally occasions vomiting and purging on its first exhibition. If vomiting be required it will be advantageous to employ chamomile tea along with the vitriolic solution. If the medicine seems to much nauseate a small quantity of which is taken and will prove useful the dose must be diminished. If it produce griping or purging after it has been used for a little while, it will

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to prevent & counteract these effects by the addition of a small quantity of opium. There is no need to be any particular regimen: the patient may eat his usual meals, and at the usual times. Such is Moseley's account of his remedy. I cannot say a great deal respecting it from my own personal experience. The principal objection to its employment is its exceedingly nauseating and unpleasant effects on the stomach. Few persons will enduring it for a long time even in the small doses. It is little employed in this city or in the country. But formerly it was much more used, and was a favorite remedy with the late Dr. Price, or Taylor who was enthusiastic in its praises, referring it to all other articles in chronic diarrhoea. That it is evidently true might be inferred from the known qualities of its constituents, and from the testimony of the most respectable practitioners who have employed it. Nevertheless it should be remarked that it is extremely disagreeable & it is with considerable reluctance that patients can be prevailed on to take it.

It remains to say something of blisters as a remedy in diarrhoea. The whole testimony of all practitioners is entirely in their favour. They may

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be applied to either of the extremities, and it has been said by Rush that their efficacy is augmented by their alternate application first to the ankles and then to the wrists. They act on the principle of revulsion, or by withdrawing disease from the centre to the circumference. They are good also by breaking down the subservient associations on which diarrhoea and other chronic diseases principally depend. To obtain their full effect they should be retained 24 hours. The surface of the body and that of the intestines are antagonising powers, and by creating irritation on the skin we may often do many chronic diseases of the alimentary canal which are accompanied by, or depend on any irritation in that part.

Of the several forms of Diaphoretic diarrhoea it now only remains for me to treat of that which depends on debility or relaxation of the alimentary canal.

This is often met with in the final stage of inflammatory diarrhoea above described; tho' more commonly it occurs as a primary affection of the vessels among people who from extreme old age or other causes are very much

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The indication of cure is exceedingly simple and points directly to the restoration of tone to the stomach and bowels. For this purpose the whole catalogue of tonics and astringents has been run through in the treatment of the case. Among the best of these remedies, is undoubtedly the galla senna or its various salts, for combination. The senna Nitro is also highly recommended, as an astringent to the bowels, in this form of diarrhoea much has been said of logwood. It has been considerably employed by the practitioners of this city. It is administered in strong decoction in the case of a table spoonful every hour. As a mere astringent it is indeed very powerful and is exceedingly efficacious in this form of diarrhoea. But our own country supplies us with several important articles, of this class. The first which I shall mention is the geranum macrorhizum. The root is the part selected and is generally prepared by being boiled in milk. I have no experience myself with the article, but from the testimonies of others I am induced to believe that much attention is due to it in the treatment of diarrhoea arising from

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ability. The dose of the decoction in milk is a tablespoonful.

The indigenous article most employed and which is preferable to the rest when more exigency is desired is the root of the black berry or doctor-ry. a wineglass full of the strong decoction of the root may be given every two or three hours.

These articles are best suited to diseases occurring in extreme old age.

To the preceding remedies I will add one which I consider worthy of attention. I mean the wild indigo, known to botanists by the name of *Isatis tinctoria*. It may be given in powder decoction or tincture. The dose of the powder is from a drachm to half a drachm. I have had a diarrhoea patient under my care during the last summer. I gave the tincture in the dose of 3j. every two hours, and in three days the patient was perfectly well & has remained well ever since. This patient had been labouring under the disease for two weeks previously to taking this medicine during which time he had taken the bark mixtures without effect. My friend Dr. W. W. Lewis intends to write on this plant & give it in several cases of the disease and I shall accept

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The mineral acids are important articles especially in all acute protracted cases of diarrhoea. It is worthy of remark that while the vegetable acids uniformly aggravate the complaint, of the alimentary canal, the mineral acids have an effect directly opposite. The sulphuric and nitric acids are most employed, and of these two the nitric is generally preferred.

Little however will any course of medicine avail in diarrhoea unless we adopt an appropriate diet. This ought to consist of light and digestible food; such as boiled rice with mack, sago arrow root, and the lighter sorts of meats roasted, as lamb, chicken &c. Weak brandy and water would not be injurious as a drink. Many cases of diarrhoea are especially those of long standing originate in Dyspepsia and are kept up by a relaxed state of the stomach. I have rarely met with a case of diarrhoea in which the stomach was not more or less affected. All the rules of diet which are applicable to the treatment of dyspepsia are here to be strictly enforced. and when gastric symptoms are particularly marked it will be proper to use also the medicines required in

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Digestion - specially the preparations of iron
The vegetable bitters also as corumbi Semarou-
ta, quassia &c are all beneficial in cases of
diarrhoea connected with dyspepsia. By
addressing our minces to the Stomach and
acting into our aid the whole treatment of
digestion we well often find the most ob-
stinate cases give way.

It is necessary that an equable tempera-
ture on the surface should be preserved, and
the best means of accomplishing this is the
flannel roller. This is particularly described by
Dewar. He finds speaks of the utility of keeping
in a natural degree of warmth on the surface
in all the lower affections particularly in dyspe-
psia, his process is follows: "toss a fine folds of
flannel very fine, or a large piece of fleecy hosi-
ery is to be placed on the abdomen, and over this
a flannel bandage is to be passed rather tightly
and in a uniform manner from the groin to the
arm pit and brought back again. This mode
of confining a certain degree of heat over that
part of the body which is the seat of the disease
should be persevered in by the patient as long
as the complaint continues. When the bandage

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is easily resorted it seldom fails to effect a cure. In whatever stage it is employed it procures a very speedy amelioration of the symptoms. It acts on the same principle with the warm bath, but is one of the best, remedies in inflammatory diseases; it possesses all the virtues, and is free from inconvenience. The bath which regulates by the thermometer is apt to be too warm and to produce a perspiration so profuse as to be succeeded by an alarming shivering, and as it cools, it demands frequent additions of warmth which breaks the uniformity of its temperature. It can be used so long as the disease requires. But by wearing flannel in the manner described, the patient always bears about him a bath inviolable in its temperature, which never weakens by perspiration, nor will interrupt him in eating, sleeping or his various walks, and renders it no longer necessary for him not to expose himself to cold. The immediate effects are first to remove the coarse torpor of the abdominal under which hysterical patients are apt to labour. Before the application of flannel they feel as if they had no bowels, but when it is applied you perceive over the whole abdomen the anxiety before

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country; secondly it obviates the tormenta and restlessness. The torso of the bursa is relieved in...
ly by occasional pain which seems to move them
more than before. The furred bandage has got
the advantage of this pain. Third it removes depres-
sion and languor: the patient more is invig-
orated and better fitted for the emergency of life.
Fourth it corrects the difficulty of breathing which
increases the debility arising from exertion.
If the bandage is drawn too tight it produces
a distinct kind of dyspnoea and should be
loosened, &c. &c.

How highly is the furred bandage recommended
in inflammatory hysteria. I have little
experience with it in that disease. It is highly
recommended by Professor Chapman as one
of the most important means in the ma-
nagement of diarrhoea.

In the treatment of diarrhoea visits from
ability regular exercise should not be over-
looked. Taken in any way, it is beneficial,
but more so on horseback than any other;
and especially if the patient be out on a long
journey. Even if all these remedies fail
we should not surrender up our patient to

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despair: much may be expected from the use of mercury. This article is of uncontroloed utility when the diarrhoea is connected with a disease of any of the phlegmatic viscera: even when this is not the case it proves serviceable by instituting a set of new actions. In this way we may often succeed in curing a disease which has resisted all other remedies.

When every thing else has failed we should recommend to our patient as a dernier resort to take a voyage by sea to some temperate climate. This is an important means of cure and will sometimes succeed when all other remedies have been tried in vain.

As regards Symptomatic Diarrhoea - which constitutes the second division of the subject I will not go into my minute details. It is to be managed on those principles and by those remedies which I have already mentioned in treating of the history and cure of idiopathic diarrhoea. But we should constantly bear in mind that discharges of this kind are often critical and highly fatal and could not be checked by artificial interposition. diarrhoea

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often occurs, at the crisis of acute fevers, is occasionally caused by gout, and also attends during the process of Detumescence: In these cases, we should always suffer it to go on until it become so profuse as to cause debility.

so much time & money will be wasted with
those who are being fed unwise plans in order
not to be militarily forced into peace
terms as of 1812 which would have been
far better suited to the country to proceed to



